

## **SECTION 1: OVERVIEW**

### **Purpose**

*New Hampshire Outdoors, 2003-2007* is New Hampshire's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). It serves as the State's official plan for outdoor recreation for the ensuing five years. The SCORP identifies major issues and challenges concerning the state's recreation and natural resources and offers a series of recommendations to address those issues. In some cases, the recommendations are guidelines; in others, they give direction for specific action, particularly for State agencies. This document satisfies a requirement of the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program that each state have an approved SCORP on file with the National Park Service (NPS) in order to participate in the LWCF program. It also fulfills New Hampshire statutory requirements (RSA 12-A:18) for an outdoor recreation planning program.

### **How To Use This Plan**

This Plan can be used as a reference guide or information source for those interested in recreational trends, supply, and demand. Data is provided, often on a county-level, for the supply of recreation and open space lands in the state, as well as on nationwide and statewide demand. This Plan can also give recreational providers and decision-makers information characterizing major recreation-related issues in the state, and some recommendations for addressing these issues. Finally, this Plan provides more specific guidance to communities and school districts about how stateside Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) monies for communities will be targeted in the upcoming five-year period.

### **New Hampshire Outdoors**

With just a little over 9,000 square miles of land area, and 5,900 miles of shoreline/riverfront, New Hampshire's natural and cultural landscape provides a great setting for people to participate in a wide range of recreation opportunities. New Hampshire's four-season climate allows for a great diversity of recreational pursuits, from alpine and cross-country skiing or snowmobiling, to swimming, boating, and sunbathing. "Leaf peepers" come from all over the world to enjoy the renowned autumn foliage of the state as they travel scenic byways by automobile, bus and bicycle.

New Hampshire is home to approximately 1,000 lakes and ponds, 18 miles of coastline, and 1,200 miles of rivers. They possess significant recreational potential, including opportunities for swimming, water sports, fishing, and boating. Over 83 percent of New Hampshire is heavily forested, including the popular 760,000 acre White Mountain National Forest (WMNF) offering scenic beauty as well as vast opportunities for hiking, camping, picnicking, and wilderness experiences. In addition, over one million acres of private forest and agricultural land is available for public uses such as hunting, fishing, nature appreciation, hiking, and ski touring. The state harbors hundreds of species of fish and wildlife, including popular game species, and several endangered and threatened species enjoyed by naturalists, birdwatchers, and photographers. New Hampshire's historic resources, rich in tradition, contribute to the state's scenic beauty and cultural

heritage. Small historic villages, distinctive architecture, covered bridges, winding country roads, and historic sites are all part of that tradition.

Tourism is one of the most important industries in the state. Our natural and cultural resources are important draws; inspiring millions of residents and out-of-state visitors alike to enjoy the state's mountains, forests, lakes, rivers, and coastline. Promoting and encouraging the enjoyment of the state's outdoors builds the tourism industry and increases its contributions to the state's economy. With this, however, also comes the need to consider issues related to providing for outdoor recreation and our state's ability to manage and steward our resource base. New Hampshire's outdoors is crucial to residents' quality of life and the continued success of our tourism industry. It is important for the State to protect what it also seeks to promote.

### **What is “Outdoor Recreation”?**

With this diverse array of natural and cultural resources, outdoor recreation is comprised of countless activities that are categorized in a variety of ways. Some activities require specialized skill or equipment (e.g. rock-climbing, off-road recreation vehicle); others such as picnicking can be enjoyed by anyone. Some activities require a structured environment and take place in developed recreation areas (e.g. tennis); others, such as walking, are unstructured and can take place in many different places, at any time. Activities can be motorized or non-motorized, consumptive (e.g. hunting, fishing) and non-consumptive (e.g. bird-watching), active (soccer) or passive (sightseeing), have relatively high impact (e.g. All-Terrain Vehicles) or low impact (e.g. hiking).

Different resources classify recreation in different ways. Below are two examples. In the *Illustrated Book of Development Definitions* (Moskowitz and Lindbloom, 1993), recreation is described as either passive or active. In this book, active recreation consists of leisure activities that “require equipment or take place at prescribed places, sites, or fields”. Passive recreation includes those that are relatively inactive or “less energetic”, but also mean “open space for nature walks and observation”.

The National Survey on Recreation and Environment (NSRE), one of the most widely cited surveys on recreation, includes over 80 activities in its survey of US residents and classifies outdoor recreation by the type of environment the activity relies upon. Activities are classified as either land-based, water-based, snow/ice-based, or developed. In the NSRE, land-based activities include trail, street and road activities, camping activities, hunting, outdoor adventure activities (e.g. horseback riding, mountain climbing), viewing/learning activities (e.g. wildlife watching), and social activities (e.g. family gatherings). Water based activities include a range of boating/floating activities, fishing, swimming activities, and viewing activities. Snow and ice-based activities include downhill activities (e.g. snowboarding, skiing), cross country activities, ice-skating and snowmobiling. In the NSRE, developed recreational activities (i.e. those that require a developed setting or facility) include golf, tennis, outdoor team sports, and attending sporting events or other outdoor events.

This SCORP plan recognizes that people participate in a broad range of activities that can all be considered part of outdoor recreation. Some activities may rely on developed recreational sites, others rely on large tracts of undeveloped open space, or access to public waters. In this report, recreation facilities include sites that provide for activities requiring some type of constructed or built facility. Examples might include established campgrounds, picnic areas, boat launches, fishing piers, tennis courts, golf courses, and the like. Recreational areas may offer recreational facilities or may offer opportunities for more dispersed recreation such as hiking, bird watching, or mountain biking. Some recreational areas may have established facilities; others may not. Undeveloped open space (public or private) can also provide for dispersed recreation activities such as hiking, hunting, snowshoeing and nature observation.

### **Planning Process**

The broadness of this topic mandates that this statewide plan identify and address many different outdoor recreation-related issues and needs. Accordingly, the planning process used to help understand these issues and needs requires consideration of many different perspectives.

**Steering Committee.** Several methods were used to help identify issues of statewide importance. A SCORP Steering Committee was identified to provide the most direct input and guidance in the planning process. This committee met several times during the planning process to help form the direction of the plan, to review and revise major issue areas, well as identify recommendations to address these issues.

**Public Advisory Committee.** A second, larger SCORP Public Advisory Committee was also developed in order to provide a wider range of organizations an opportunity to provide input and feedback about major recreational issues facing New Hampshire. The Office of State Planning and the Department of Resources and Economic Development identified the advisory committee jointly. This larger group met twice during the planning process. The first meeting was held early on in the planning process. Organizations were invited to attend an Outdoor Recreation Forum to offer direct input geared to help frame issues of statewide importance for the SCORP (**see Appendix B**). A second forum was conducted to offer this same group an opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions about SCORP recommendations. The University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension staff served as facilitators at both forums.

**Stakeholder Group Survey.** Early on in the process, a concern was raised that recreation touches upon a much wider range of interests than could be reflected by a public advisory committee. In addition, the Office of State Planning looked to expand statewide knowledge and awareness of the SCORP planning process. With these thoughts in mind, the Office of State Planning worked with the University of New Hampshire (UNH) to undertake a Stakeholder Group Survey as both an information gathering technique and public participation and communication techniques.

In the summer of 2002, UNH developed a database of organizations and businesses related to recreation and conservation in New Hampshire. This database was meant to

establish baseline information about a range of organizations and serve as the invitation list to participate in the organization version of the web survey. In all over 3,000 organizations and businesses were identified. Interests ranged from State agencies to local recreation clubs, conservation organizations to recreation directors, tourism organizations to ski clubs, all-terrain vehicle (ATV) clubs and fishing/hunting clubs.

Directors, contact persons, or other leadership of organizations included in this database were sent a post card explaining the purpose of the survey and asking their organization for input. They were given a choice of either logging on to a web site to complete the survey online, or were given an opportunity to call a toll free number and receive a hard copy of the survey in the mail. For those contacts with email information, UNH also sent two email invitations with direct hyperlinks to the web site. In addition to this targeted outreach effort geared towards recreation and conservation organizations, press releases were sent to newspapers across the state and information was posted on the Office of State Planning's website asking for public input. The survey itself asked respondents to identify recreational issues and asked for strategies for addressing these issues, asked for opinions about public funding priorities related to recreation, and asked about personal awareness of the SCORP and Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Participants were directed to either an organizational or public version of the website. Data collection began in mid August and ended by the end of September. While this public input process would ideally be allowed to continue over a period of several months, the tight timeline did not allow for this. By the end of September, about 225 organizational responses and 250 other public responses were received.

**Findings.** As told by the wide variety of outdoor recreational interests that responded to this survey, this effort appears to have been a good first attempt at casting the SCORP planning process out to a wider audience. Clearly, a majority of respondents had little direct knowledge of either the SCORP or the Land and Water Conservation Fund before completing the survey. Less than 18 percent of organizational leaders were familiar or extremely familiar with the SCORP and only eight percent of public respondents were familiar or extremely familiar with the SCORP. Over 43 percent of organizational leaders and over 60 percent of public respondents said they did not know that local communities and school districts could apply to DRED for LWCF funds. Those who did not participate in this survey are potentially even less aware of the SCORP process or funding opportunities than those who did participate.

Beyond public education and information, a main goal of the survey was to solicit feedback about outdoor recreation issues of importance in the state. Respondents were asked in their own words to discuss major issues, barriers, and potential problems they see related to outdoor recreation. These open-ended responses provided a wealth of information about different stakeholder viewpoints and perspectives.

Because of the broad range of open ended perspectives and responses received, the UNH staff also reviewed and categorized responses as a means of better understanding trends and common themes. This content analysis informed the SCORP planning process by

providing information about commonly perceived barriers and common perspectives for addressing issues. For instance, many stakeholders, regardless of individual recreational preferences, indicated that the State could better address issues by forging partnerships and enhancing collaborative efforts among diverse recreational users, by providing better information to the public and supporting or providing better education of recreational users. Other themes that came forth included the need for better planning, research, and the need for more funding.

An important outcome of this survey is that many respondents, regardless of a particular recreational preference or attitude (e.g. there is too much motorized access or, alternatively, there is too little motorized access in New Hampshire), generally recognized common themes and needs related to resolving issues. This set an important foundation for building the SCORP recommendations discussed later in the document. A summary report of these open-ended responses can be found in **Appendix C-2**

Quantitative information (e.g. data reported numerically) was also gathered to serve as a reference point, including respondent attitudes towards recreation spending and funding priorities. This information helped to characterize respondents/stakeholders and their viewpoints. While informative background information, this data has certain limitations. This numerical data cannot be used to portray or represent attitudes of the entire population of state residents because respondents to this survey were self selected, not part of a random sample of state residents. More detailed results of the stakeholder group survey, including a full description of methods, can be found in **Appendix C-1**.

While this stakeholder attitudinal data is not referred to directly in the SCORP, there is a baseline of statewide resident attitudes towards recreational issues available via a recent University of New Hampshire *Statewide Outdoor Recreation Needs Assessment*. An overview of this 1997 statewide resident survey is reported in the “Recreational Demand” section of this report and a summary report is available in **Appendix A**. An update and follow up to this statewide assessment is expected before the next SCORP is completed (2008).

**Regional Meetings.** In addition to the Steering Committee, Public Advisory Committee, and the UNH Stakeholder Survey, six regional meetings were held across the state in early to mid December 2002 to seek public comment and input on the draft SCORP plan. These meetings ran concurrently with the month long public comment period on the draft SCORP. The range of comments helped the Steering Committee decide upon the final content of the plan. Summaries of the public meeting discussions are available at OSP upon request.

### **Focus of Plan**

This plan has two main components. The first is intended to provide a broad understanding of outdoor recreation demand, need and participation trends in New Hampshire. The second is to identify and develop an understanding of major recreation-related issues faced in the state. This plan provides guidance for how New Hampshire

expends federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) monies on a community level and provides direction for addressing statewide recreational issues.

The first section provides a summary of available statistics and data related to the supply and demand for outdoor recreation. National and statewide trends are highlighted in the beginning and summarized throughout. Specific regional issues and trends were not identified in this planning process due to financial, staffing, and time constraints<sup>1</sup>.

The second main section provides information about recreation issues of statewide importance. The highlights of each issue are summarized in the beginning, followed by reference information about programs and initiatives that frame the issue in New Hampshire. Using this information as a foundation, goals, objectives, and strategies are then provided to act as a framework for how New Hampshire can address these issues. Some strategies relate directly to how LWCF funds could be expended, while other strategies consist of broader policy or practical recommendations. Though some recommendations are targeted to specific agencies/organizations, many can be applied on either a statewide, regional, and local level.

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<sup>1</sup> It is recommended that future SCORP planning efforts examine demand and need on both a regional and statewide level to better meld trends/findings from this plan with other regional and local planning efforts.